stop the political **censorship** of student newspapers

The four 1995 editors of the La Trobe University student paper *Rabelais* are being threatened with six years gaol and a possible seventy-two thousand dollar fine each. An ever-increasing number of students in Victoria are being arrested and charged with a variety of ridiculous offences, as part of a concerted effort to censor, intimidate, criminalise and repress the student movement. Why?

Anti-student unionism

Following the introduction of anti-student union legislation introduced by the Victorian and Western Australian Liberal Governments in 1994, the activities of student organisations in those states have been severely restricted. Amongst other things, under Victorian law no student organisation may spend student fees on a student newspaper. In the face of these restrictions, the ALP federal government stepped in, declaring that it would fund student organisations to an amount equal to that which would formerly have been spent on activities now forbidden under state law. At that time student organisations were given assurances by the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Simon Crean, that the government would not attempt to use federal funding as a means of control of student organisations, and that they would attempt to protect freedom of expression and creative activity in university life.

Media-spasm

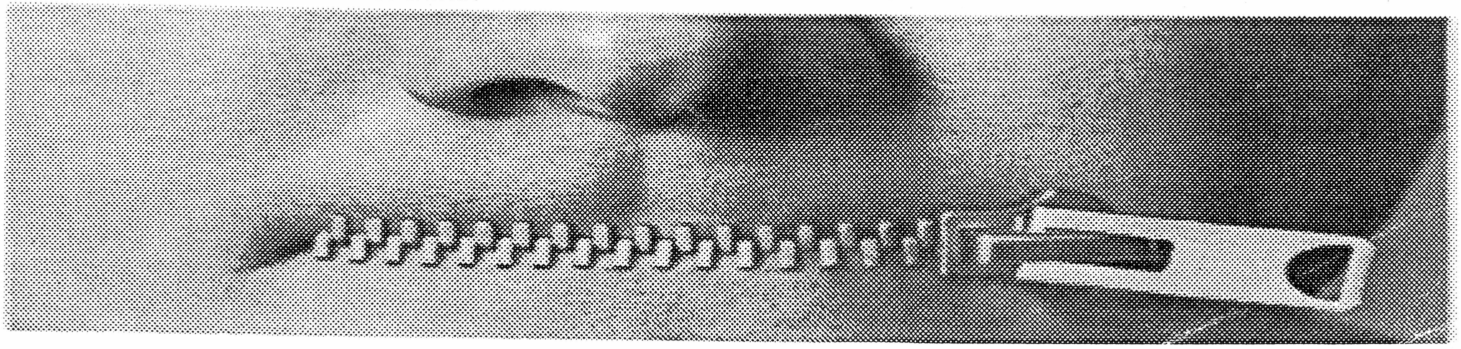
The July 1995 edition of *Rabelais* contained an article entitled 'The Art of Shoplifting', which was more-or-less identical to articleswhich have floated around in student papers for years. However, the frenzy which surrounded the publication of this article took on unprecendented proportions.

The Retail Traders Association–which is dominated by large corporations like Coles-Myer rather than, say, your local milkbar–called for the edition to be 'pulped' and began a campaign which has continued until this day. They threatened to get 'an injunction' to stop the RMIT student newspaper *Catalyst* republishing the article, and successfully applied to the national censorship board to have *Rabelais* and *Catalyst* banned. (The publications concerned only discovered this several months later, from documents included in the prosecution brief.)

The La Trobe University Vice-Chancellor publicly deplored the article. The media-spasm carried over fomr talk-back radio, to the television news (all channels), to newspapers and current affairs programs and back to talk-back radio.

Censorship and intimidation

Then, on the John Laws show, then Minister Crean made an apparently spontaneous promise to remove funds for the July edition of *Rabelais* from the La Trobe SRC. He then had his lawyers search for a law which *Rabelais* could be said to have broken, and wrote a letter to the La Trobe SRC informing them of this decision. Crean claims that this is not censorship, because the laws under which the federal government passes on money to student organisations specify that these funds must be used for 'lawful' purposes. Pre-empting any court or legal process, Crean claimed that the article contravened the Victorian *Classification of Film and Publications Act* 1990, in supposedly producing and distributing material which 'promotes, incites and instructs in matters of crime'.



For the record, reprinted in full below is the article which appeared in *Rabelais* edition 6 volume 29, 1995.

The Art of

Shoplifting is a topic that is practically relevant to many and it should therefore not become an exclusive craft confined to a small shoplifting elite. On the contrary, shoplifting is an art that deserves the widest possible dissemination. For your convenience we have printed below a step by step guide to shoplifting. Good Luck.

Within capitalism, most of us are either (1) alienated from our labour and hence dependent on the ruling classes for commodities as basic as food and clothing, (2) excluded from the division of labour, in which case we are likewise dependant on the State, or (3) performing unpaid and/or unrecognised labour and hence dependant on patriarchal relations for food, clothing, etcetera. In any case, our access to resources is severely limited by contemporary relations of domination. One partial solution to this problem may be to STEAL!

Sadly, however, many people living precariously on low incomes tend to either: (1) *avoid shoplifting* for anachronistic moral and/or ethical reasons; or (2) *remain ignorant* of the better methods and techniques of shoplifting, thus failing to maximise their lifting potential.

From the onset, the golden rule of theft should be enunciated: NEVER STEAL FROM SOMEBODY WHO COULD CONCEIVABLY BE A COMRADE. Hence kicking into a house on Bell Street with a beaten up old Mazda in the yard is irresponsible and counter-revolutionary!

Be careful, too, about taking stuff from small 'corner store' type shops—you could be ripping off someone in a situation not dissimilar to your own. On the whole, it is best to play it safe and go straight for the big corporate fuckers.

Some people will suggest that shoplifters are a selfish breed, since 'we all pay for it in the end' through inflated prices to cover losses and so forth. However, comrades, this and closely analogous arguments are used to justify lowering wages, breaking unions, lowering corporate taxation and taxation on the rich, etcetera. If we are going to accept the idea we have an interest in maintaining the high profits of the rich and corporate sector we may as well sell ourselves into bonded slavery now, or join the Liberal Party.

No, the injunction against stealing from capitalism is itself a capitalist ideology and should be spurned as such. Although we have been taught that 'thou shalt not steal', an order historically backed by threats of divine retribution, this should not for one minute stop us from taking the redistribution of wealth into our own hands; Believe me, no-one is likely to do it for us.

What follows is a list of effective methods and observations that may prove useful. Good luck.

preparing oneself for the big haul

(1) If possible, you should always have some money on you when intending to shoplift, because if you've got none, it's rather hard to argue that to steal the item was a spontaneous decision. As a result, if you've got no money and are caught shoplifting you are more than likely to be charged for burglary as well as theft.

(2) Buying something at the same time that you steal stuff doesn't necessarily ensure success. Approaching staff for items you are absolutely sure they don't have is just as good. Think of something that you know they don't have (ie, a doona cover with a specific pattern on it or something equally obscure) and pretend that you are looking for this, so that you have an excuse for being there. If staff are ever suspicious of you or ask if they can help you, ask them if they've got the thing you are sure they don't have. Never screw this up—if you do you will have to buy the item or they may realise that you are there to steal.

(3) It is always a good idea to carry a bag although you should never stash anything in it—if security/sales staff are suss on you the first place that they'll check is your bag and it may just get you off the hook if they can't find anything suspicious inside of it.

(4) Remember that there is no such thing as a standard store detective—there is no qualifying dress code, age, race, gender or class. Grandma will bust you this week and next week it'll be a 5 year old kid.

(5) Just as there is no typical store detective nor is there a standard shoplifter. Security do not go looking for the poorly dressed people. They may pick on you out of boredom, but remember, only an unsuccessful store detective picks on poorly dressed people. By the same token don't believe the stale myth that suits + dresses = more successes; security anticipate that professional shoplifters will dress up a bit. Wear whatever you want.

on entering the maze

(1) As soon as you enter the store, suss out the sales people. First impressions often count here. You could find a valuable blind-eye turning ally in younger or less-affluent employees. Alternatively, an employee can often stand out as a more wishy-washy gullible individual—so even if they see you they are likely to be too gutless to mention it, either to you or to security.

(2) Don't be put off by signs such as 'shoplifters will be prosecuted' or 'security police patrol this store'. Often this is this is just bluff anyway, and in any case there is no security measure that cannot be undone by a clever shoplifter or a quick talker. Do, however, keep your eye on security and be on the lookout for video surveillance cameras.

(3) Try to find where the video surveillance monitors are and who is watching them; often they are not even looking at them. See if you can get a glance at their monitor. Often it is one monitor hooked up to 20 cameras which changes sequentially (every 30 seconds or so). Other times its one guy in a room looking at 50 screens while reading the paper or glued to the box. These monitors are usually pretty small and have a wide aperture, showing more of the room but not enough detail to adequately see what you are up to.

(4) It is a good idea to keep your back to the camera as much as possible without looking suspicious. Checkout camera's (hold-up cameras) are often set up to check on employees, so they are not hard to keep your back turned to.

blind-spots and other lifting techniques

(1) A blind-spot is a section of the store where you are barely visible and can thus feel free to both dump and collect stuff, without fear of being seen. Display units can make perfect blind-spots—they ensure security is confident they have their eye on you, when in fact they can only see your top half—at the same time they enable you to keep your eye on security. For these reasons, the best blind-spots are usually below the chest—around waist high. Blindspots are good for loading into the lip of your jeans or into a jacket.

(2) Make sure your blind-spot is not under surveillance. Never hang around your blind-spot for too long. Most of all, be careful to never lead security to your blind-spot.

(3) A good method is to take everything you want to your blind-spot and collect it all later in one go, or better still get someone else to collect it for you. Getting someone else to collect for you can be a great system, particularly with exchanges—which I'll come to later. If you are really pedantic, or you think that they are watching you, then load up, go to the toilets and pass the stuff under the wall/petition of the cubicle to a waiting friend in an adjoining cubicle and get them to leave with it.

(5) Speaking of dunnies and change-rooms, one of the oldest tricks in the book is to put more than one garment on a hanger (works particularly well with women's underwear), go to the change-rooms and put the garment underneath what you are wearing. Alternatively, if you are a woman, you can slip your old bra on a hanger and put on the new one. Don't be put off by the staff as you enter the change-rooms—they are usually quite disinterested and so long as the number of hangers you exit with matches the little plastic number they've given you they'll be satisfied.

(6) On the subject of women's underwear, the lingerie department is ideally suited to male shoplifters—not only is it the perfect excuse for looking embarrassed or suspicious (they have come to expect this), but staff are less likely to harass you by trying to help you and will be more sympathetic generally.

exchanging crap for more crap

(1) Exchanging things—that is, taking the redistribution of wealth into your own hands by refunding yourself for an item you never payed for, or swapping

Shoplifting.

something you stole that you don't want for something you do want, or swapping something that you don't want that is unstealable and therefore refundable—is a whole new ball game.

(2) If you plan to steal something and then make an exchange always take stuff that people are likely to take back like sheets, or other obscure household items. If questioned you can say to them "as if I'm gonna keep the receipt, I didn't plan to bring it back". Books and other small but expensive items such as computer software are also great exchangeables.

(3) Stealing women's underwear and cosmetics are the perfect alibi for male shoplifters who specialise in exchanges. Male customers always fuck up buying stuff for their girlfriends/wives/mothers and when it comes to lingerie, its just too easy for a guy to look goofy, have sales staff sympathise and all too quickly agree to exchange or refund the items. This works particularly well around Xmas time when you can tell them you bought it for your mother but she already had that one.

(4) Never take an exchange item to the store you stole it from and make sure the other store (ie, Myers in Doncaster as opposed Northland) has the same item before you take it back.

(5) Make sure you have chosen your item before you approach anyone for an exchange. Also, tell the people in the first department that you want an exchange without mentioning receipts—they should send you down to the appropriate department for your other item and then ring up this department providing a referral, which if you are lucky will mean you do not have to provide a receipt given that everything appears legitimate.

(6) The first time you exchange a stolen item for another product make sure you get something unstealable in return, like a video, watch, or something else kept behind a counter, so that the second time you do it, even if you don't get an exchange receipt they will not suspect that it is stolen.

(7) Exchange receipts are a pain in the arse. Sometimes smart arse sales people will write across the original docket 'no original reciept' which is a problem, so if you have a bit of money on you, it is a good idea to exchange for something that costs a little bit more so that they have to give you a cash receipt.

(8) Don't freak out if they call security while you are acting out an exchange—as returns will often require security's signature this is quite standard procedure and nothing to worry about.

(9) If you're having problems getting an exchange, big department stores normally have consumer rights people located upstairs somewhere—they can usually be contacted by information telephones. These are people with big egos who like to wield power and the sales staff, who are much lower down the hierarchy, are usually pretty freaked out by this power. If you do get the ego from upstairs on side, they will organise a sales person to look after you and after the egomaniac goes up upstairs again, they sure will—because the sales person does not want to reprimanded by the same person from upstairs more than once, you will be practically able to get them to do anything that you want them to. A good technique is to tell the person upstairs a different story to the one that you tell the sales person. You can get angry at this stage and tell them that they fucked you around, that you don't want an exchange anymore and that you want a refund now and they will usually comply.

(10) Be wary of the long term employee—you've got to know when to stop. Be particularly wary of the head of sales or middle management who have been working there for a long time (sometimes 20 years or more) and are not as scared of the big guys from upstairs as are the newer employees. You can often convince some of the younger staff that they are allowed to do refunds if you tell them that you used to work there.

(11) Another commonly used technique is to take an empty bag from the same store with a receipt in it for previously payed for items and then nick the same stuff, which gives you the perfect alibi.

(12) Better still, if you've got some money, find two things that are worth however much you've got, take them out of the store and stash them somewhere, then go back in and buy the exact same items. While leaving the checkout, make a big deal about it. "Am I doing the right thing? Will she like it? Will it fit him? etcetera" and then "what the heck!" (Make sure you don't go overboard and push them to mention keeping the receipt or worst of all mention it yourself.) Pay for it. About half an hour to a couple of hours later (not too long) take the stuff back to the same sales people and they'll usually give you cash without a receipt because they remember selling it to you. If you pull it off you've got a cash receipt and your stolen goods which you can exchange at another store.

leaving the store safely

(1) Always double back just as you are about to leave the store so that you can check if anyone is following you (99.9% of the time they will follow you out of the store before they approach you). Alternatively, go up and down an escalator or in a lift and press every button in the lift and it will be obvious if anyone is following you.

(2) If people are watching you, whatever you do, do not try to discreetly dump stuff unless you are absolutely sure that you can get away with it. If caught dumping stuff they usually won't charge you but they may fuck you around for a few hours.

(3) If you are caught dumping stuff never let a store detective know it was because of them. Always make out it was a result of a sudden guilty conscience. Never let a store detective know that you know that they are on to you, because they won't put them on you the next time. That way you get to know store security and are able to keep your eye on them as much as you can.

(4) If you want to have a bit of a fun and don't plan to continue shoplifting that day, or ever or you just don't give a shit, go up to a store detective and treat them like a sales person, asking them for help etcetera. It is just as embarrassing for them to be caught as it is for you. It is always a good thing to break their spirits or at least bring them down every now and again. Alternatively, use reverse psychology on them. Say "I'm going down to such and such department. I'll see you down there". Often they'll be too embarrassed that they've been busted and think that you won't do it now that you're being watched and you will have the run of the mill.

(5) NEVER GET TOO CONFIDENT or you will start to make silly mistakes.

the end

Finally, if you get caught—lie your teeth out! Never admit to premeditation. Always say that the opportunity arose, so you took it. Don't act tough or be a smart arse. Cry. Bawl. Admit a guilty conscience. Beg them not to call the cops. Tell them that CSV will take your kids off you and then weep.

Even though some stores say they have a policy to call the police it is not necessarily true and they may, after lots of tears and admissions of guilt, just get you to sign a statement which says you'll never enter that store again. If the cops do arrive, its a good idea to act scared shitless because they may assume you're a first offender and not bother to check your record. Don't antagonise the filth—it is their personal discretion as to how bad you get busted.

You are most likely to be charged with 'theft' if caught shoplifting, but you can be charged with 'burglarly' as well if you don't have any money on you. 'Equipped to steal' is what you will be charged with if, for example, you have a slit in the lining of your jacket for concealing stolen goods. 'Obtaining financial advantage' and 'deception' are what you are likely to be charged with as well as 'theft', if caught exchanging stolen items.

Carmen Lawrence, with thanks to Josuah and *Destroyer 267*

If you get busted, the following telephone numbers may be useful: Alphaline Emergency 24 hour legal free service (for people under 25 years old) Phone: 419 7427; Fitzroy Legal Service Ph: 419 3744; West Heidelberg Legal Service Ph: 459 8833

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continued from the front page

Simon Crean then handed the article to the Victorian Attorney-General Jan Wade–presumably to begin to provide a 'legal' basis for his censorship. The four *Rabelais* editors were arrested, finger-printed, photographed and interrogated by the Preston CIB. The police then began harassing anybody they could find with the same name as the then SRC President, Lynda Memery, turning up at 7.30 in the morning and insisting that people prove that they were not Lynda. Crean has since fined other student newspapers which have published the article.

This is an unprecedented use of this act, and would vastly expand the scope of censorship laws. The threat to *Rabelais* and its editors is a threat to the independence of every student organisation and to many other community groups and trade unions. A conviction would constitute a remarkable extension of the scope of censorship laws. The Victorian government has declared that many forms of protest around the Grand Prix are illegal. Will someone from Save Albert Park be arrested and possibly jailed for producing a leaflet? Many strikes and pickets are technically illegal. Will union officials be jailed for producing a union journal?

Defend free speech and oppose political repression

Though it is being used as a pretext for repression, shoplifting is not the primary issue here; it doesn't matter whether you agree with the substance of the article–the fundamental issues concern student control of student affairs, opposition to government censorship and political persecution. The Federal ALP Government is (was) replicating the State Liberal Government's desire to control student unions. If a view is unacceptable to the ALP, they will destroy it–particularly if the media whip up a hysteria and the corporate sector also finds a view to be beyond the pale. Victorian Attorney-General Jan Wade is continuing the logic by attempting to gaol the editors.

This is not an isolated incident: there has been substantial police harassment of the anarchist Barricade Books, and one of the shop's collective is currently being charges under a different part of the same Act being used against the *Rabelais* editors, for the distribution of t-shirts with the slogans 'Fuck the police' and 'Jesus is cumming', a pamphlet detailing a homosexual relationship and similar material.

Meanwhile, universities and the Victorian Liberal government have been attempting to impose severe restrictions on the ability of student organisations to operate autonomously. At La Trobe in 1995, the university administration attempted to force the Students' Representative Council into signing away much of its freedom by, among other things, refusing to hand student money to the student organisation. When students responded by occupying the administration, the university gave in and handed over the money. However, since then they have cooperated with police, and three students so far have been arrested in retaliation for the occupation, and charged with criminal damage, which has a maximum penalty of ten years gaol. The police say they are looking for more La Trobe students.

public meeting

There will be a public meeting held to discuss the charges against the 1995 editors of *Rabelais* **7pm Wednesday 3rd April, University of Technology, Sydney, room 2/413 (Tower Building)**. A ***Rabelais* editor** will be addressing this meeting; as will a speaker from ***Queer Collaborations*** to discuss the current threats by Fred Nile to sue them (and the ABC) for $1 million, alleging defamation from the QC Mardi Gras float. Also on the platform will be ***Wendy Bacon*** and a speaker from the ***Free Speech Committee.***

join the campaign

It is vital that as many people as possible join the campaign to oppose the censorship, intimidation of the *Rabelais* editors and others within the student movement. Sign the petition. Write letters to Jan Wade (Victorian Attorney-General) and newspapers. Have your union or any other organisation pass a resolution demanding that the charges be dropped (send us a copy and if possible send us a copy – Defence Committee PO Box 146, La Trobe University Post Office 3083, Victoria. tel (03) 9479 2976, fax. (03) 9479 3550. In NSW call Cass or Louise on 330 1155 (UTS) or Dave on 267 4463 (NUS).

The campaign to drop the charges against the Rabelais editors has been endorsed by Justice Action, Tim Anderson, Free Speech Committee, Wendy Bacon, Eva Cox, Peter Cronau – director Australian Centre of Investigative Journalism, Ian Cohen, Chris Nash, Gary Foley, Rod Quantock, Albert Langer, Hall Greenland – editor Sydney City Hub, Peter Beilhartz, Rosie X – geekgirl, Breakout Printing, Cam Walker (Friends of the Earth), Bernard Smith, Friends of Richmond, AMWU (VIC), ETU(VIC), NTEU (UWS), National Union of Students, Council of Postgraduate Associations (NSW), UTS Students' Association, La Trobe University SRC, Melbourne University Student Union, Sydney University SRC, Southern Cross University – Lismore SRC, International Socialist Organisation, Resistance, Socialist Labour League, Left Alliance